

Message Text

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12
ACTION EA-09

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1862
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S E C R E T SECTION 1 OF 2 WELLINGTON 3088

E.O. 11652: XGDS-2
TAGS: XB, XP, UR, MPOL, NZ
SUBJ: ASSESSMENT OF ASIAN/PACIFIC REGION PERCEPTIONS OF THE
SOVIET MILITARY PRESENCE IN THE PACIFIC (NIAM 40/11-1-76)

REF: STATE 187554

SUMMARY: THE PRESENT NEW ZELAND NATIONAL GOVERNMENT
IS AS MUCH CONCERNED OVER A POSSIBLE LAGGING OF AMERICAN
INTEREST IN THIS PART OF THE PACIFIC AS IT IS OVER INCREASING
SOVIET ACTIVITIES IN THE AREA. THE LABOUR PARTY OPPOSITION
HAS CHARGED THAT THE GOVERNMENT IS EXAGGERATING THE SOVIET
THREAT. BUT THIS THEME HAS NOT BEEN PLAYED TOO VIGOROUSLY
BECAUSE SOVIET EFFORTS TO EXPAND ITS PRESENCE IN THIS AREA
IS ALSO PERCEIVED BY MOST OF THE LABOUR PARTY AS CONFLICTING
WITH NEW ZEALAND INTERESTS. END SUMMARY.

1. PRIME MINISTER MULDOON AND THE BULK OF THE FARMER-
ORIENTED NATIONAL PARTY, ARE MORE CONSERVATIVE IN OUTLOOK
THAN MOST OBSERVERS WOULD READILY APPRECIATE. THIS IS THE
CASE IN SPITE OF THE FACT THAT EVERY NEW ZEALAND
GOVERNMENT, NATIONAL OR LABOUR, MUST DEVOTE ITSELF TO
MAINTAINING THE NEW ZEALAND VERSION OF THE WELFARE
STATE, INCLUDING FULL EMPLOYMENT. BUT THE CONSERVATIVE/
TRADITIONALIST ORIENTATION OF MULDOON'S SUPPORTERS MAKE
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THEM SUSPICIOUS OF THE SOVIET UNION. THERE IS THUS NO

DANGER OF THE PRIME MINISTER GETTING AHEAD OF HIS PARTY OR HIS SUPPORTERS IN VIEWING WITH ALARM SOVIET ACTIVITIES IN THE PACIFIC REGION.

2. IN CONTRAST TO THE NATIONAL PARTY AND ITS SUPPORTERS, THE FOREIGN POLICY ESTABLISHMENT AND THE PRESS SEEM LESS CONCERNED ABOUT SOVIET MACHINATIONS IN THE PACIFIC. FOREIGN SECRETARY FRANK CORNER AND MANY OF THE KEY OFFICIALS IN THE MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS ARE OF A MORE NEUTRALIST DISPOSITION. THE NOT VERY TALENTED PRESS IS GENERALLY IDENTIFIED WITH THE LABOUR PARTY, AND TENDS TO BE SKEPTICAL ABOUT MULDOON'S CRIES OF ALARM. PART OF THIS MAY BE DUE TO THE PRIME MINISTER'S TOUGH PUBLIC STYLE, BUT ONE RECENT TV INTERVIEWER GOT INTO A HOT ARGUMENT WITH MULDOON BY TRYING TO MAKE HIM OUT A LIAR OVER THE SOVIET NAVAL PRESENCE IN THE PACIFIC. MULDOON, HOWEVER, HAS DOWN-GRADED THE MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS BY BUILDING UP THE PRIME MINISTER'S DEPARTMENT AND REMOVING FRANK CORNER FROM THE DIRECTORSHIP OF IT. BECAUSE THE MFA HAS NEVER BEEN A POWER CENTER, AND MULDOON'S DENIGRATION OF THE MINISTRY HAS STILL FURTHER HURT MORALE THERE, IT IS DIFFICULT TO IMAGINE THE FOREIGN MINISTRY OFFICIALDOM OR THE PRESS, MAKING AN EFFECTIVE ISSUE TRYING TO REFUTE CHARGES THAT THE SOVIET UNION CONSTITUTES A THREAT TO NEW ZEALAND IN THE SOUTH PACIFIC.

3. IN A PECULIARLY OBLIQUE FASHION, HOWEVER, THE LABOUR PARTY OPPOSITION IS CLAIMING THAT MULDOON IS OVER-DRAWING THE SOVIET THREAT. THE IMMEDIATE ISSUE SEIZED UPON TO MAKE THIS POINT IS THE UXPENDING VISIT TO NEW ZEALAND OF AN AMERICAN NUCLEAR POWERED WARSHIP. THE LABOUR PARTY HAS BEEN ORCHESTRATING OPPOSITION TO NPW VISITS, CLAIMING VARIOUSLY THAT NPWS ARE DANGEROUS, THAT NEW ZEALAND WOULD BE TARGET IN NUCLEAR WAR IF IT ADMITS THE SHIPS AND THAT THERE IS NO EXTERNAL THREAT TO NEW ZEALAND THAT WOULD JUSTIFY INVOLVING THIS COUNTRY MILITARILY WITH THE UNITED STATES. IN OUR VIEW THE LABOUR PARTY HAS SEIZED ON A SHAKY ISSUE, THERE BEING LITTLE EVIDENCE THAT ANY SUBSTANTIAL NUMBER OF NEW ZEALANDERS OPPOSE NPW VISITS ON IDEOLOGICAL GROUNDS.

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IT IS TRUE, OF COURSE, THAT THE RANKS OF THOSE OPPOSING THE VISITS ARE INCREASED SOMEWHAT BY PEOPLE WHO ARE SIMPLY IGNORANT OR MISINFORMED.

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4. HAPPILY FOR MULDOON AND THE UNITED STATES, SOVIET ATTEMPTS TO ACHIEVE A FISHING, AND PERHAPS OTHER, PRESENCE IN TONGA AND WESTERN SAMOA HAVE WEAKENED THE ONLY ARGUMENT THAT HAS EVEN A SPURIOUS VALIDITY FOR OPPOSING NPW VISITS, NAMELY, THAT THERE IS NO CREDIBLE EXTERNAL THREAT TO NEW ZEALAND; THUS NO NEED FOR NEW ZEALAND TO GET MILITARILY INVOLVED WITH THE UNITED STATES. MULDOON HAS SEIZED ON SOVIET ACTIVITIES TO SOUND PUBLIC ALARMS, BOTH BECAUSE HE PERSONALLY DISTRUSTS THE SOVIET UNION AND BECAUSE HE SEES AN INTERNAL POLITICAL ADVANTAGE OVER THE LABOUR OPPOSITION IN DOING SO. THE LABOUR PARTY OPPOSITION CANNOT MAKE TOO MUCH OF THIS WITHOUT APPEARING TO BE TWO-FACED FOR IT HAS NOW COME TO LIGHT THAT THE SOVIETS LAST YEAR APPROACHED THE LABOUR GOVERNMENT FOR FISHING RIGHTS IN NEW ZEALAND. FACILITIES FOR REPAIRING, SUPPLYING AND MAINTAINING SOVIET FISHING VESSELS IN NEW ZEALAND PORTS AND THE RIGHT TO FLY FISHING CREWS BETWEEN NEW ZEALAND AND THE SOVIET UNION WERE SOUGHT. APPROVAL BY NEW ZEALAND WOULD HAVE GREATLY ENHANCED THE EFFICIENCY OF THE SOVIET FISHING EFFORT IN THE PART OF THE THE WORLD. BUT THEN-PRIME MINISTER ROWLING TOOK THE SOVIET REQUEST UNDER ADVISEMENT AND NEVER RESPONDED. ONLY WHEN THE NATIONAL GOVERNMENT CAME TO POWER LAST NOVEMBER AND THE SOVIETS MADE A SECOND APPROACH, WAS THE REQUEST TURNED DOWN. IN THESE

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CIRCUMSTANCES, ROWLING IS IN A POOR POSITION TO ATTACK MULDOON'S REFUSAL.

5. WITH THE 200-MILE ECONOMIC ZONE LIKELY TO EVENTUATE, THIS GOVERNMENT SEES A VERY CONSIDERABLE POTENTIAL ADVANTAGE FLOWING TO NEW ZEALAND. SO DID THE PREVIOUS GOVERNMENT UNDER PRIME MINISTER ROWLING. THAT UNDOUBTEDLY WAS THE BASIS OF HIS SITTING ON THE SOVIET REQUEST. THE PRESENT NEW ZEALAND GOVERNMENT, AND PROBABLY ANY FUTURE LABOUR GOVERNMENT AS WELL, WOULD NOT BE PLEASED IF THE SMALL ISLAND NATIONS OF TONGA AND WESTERN SAMOA, TRADITIONALLY IN NEW ZEALAND'S SPHERE OF INFLUENCE, GRANTED THE SOVIETS ANY KIND OF PERMANENT PRESENCE. THUS, SOVIET ACTIVITIES IN AND AROUND THIS AREA OF THE PACIFIC WILL BE UNWELCOME IN GREATER OR LESSER DEGREE TO ANY NEW ZEALAND GOVERNMENT.

6. WHERE THE PRESENT GOVERNMENT AND A FUTURE LABOUR GOVERNMENT MAY DIFFER IS IN THEIR VIEWS OF THE ROLE THE UNITED STATES SHOULD PROPERLY PLAY IN THIS PART OF THE PACIFIC. MULJMON IS UNEASY THAT THE UNITED STATES, UNDER THE IMPACT OF WATERGATE AND VIETNAM MAY LOSE INTEREST IN NEW ZEALAND. HE HAS PUBLICLY CITED THIS AS A REASON FOR WELCOMING AMERICAN NPWS. ON THE OTHER HAND, THE LABOUR PARTY HAS ARGUED THAT THE ANZUS TREATY DID NOT LANGUISH DURING THE 12 YEARS SINCE AMERICAN NPWS LAST VISITED NEW ZEALAND. THUS, THEY SAY, THE UNITED STATES WILL NOT ABANDON THIS PART OF THE WORLD WHETHER NPWS COME OR NOT. BUT IN SPITE OF THESE INTER-PARTY DIFFERENCES, THE BIG NEW ELEMENTS ARE THE PROSPECTIVE 200-MILE ECONOMIC ZONE AND RELATED SOVIET EFFORTS TO ESTABLISH WWA PRESENCE IN NEW ZEALAND'S BACKYARD. IN ANE SENSE IT DOES NOT MATTER WHETHER SOVIET AMBITIONS ARE LIMITED TO ASSURING THEIR LONG-TERM ACCESS TO FISHING RESOURCES OF THE AREA OR WHETHER THEY ULTIMATELY SEEK A MILITARY PRESENCE. FOR ANY FUTURE NEW ZEALAND GOVERNMENT WILL TRY TO PROTECT NEW ZEALAND'S TRADITIONAL SPHERE OF INFLUENCE IN THE SMALL ISLAND NATIONS OF THE AREA, PARTICULARLY TONGA AND WESTERN SAMOA, AGAINST OUTSIDE ENCROACHMENTS. THIS YEAR HAS ALREADY SEEN AN INCREASE IN THE PERCENTAGE OF NEW ZEALAND'S FOREIGN AID GOING TO ITS
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PACIFIC ISLAND NEIGHBORS. THIS WOULD ALMOST CERTAINLY ALSO BE THE CASE IF A LABOUR GOVERNMENT WERE IN POWER.

7. WE UNDERSTAND THAT PRIME MINISTERS MULDOON AND FRASER EXCHANGED VIEWS LAST MARCH OVER SOVIET ACTIVITIES IN THE PACIFIC. THE VENUE WAS THE SOUTH PACIFIC FESTIVAL OF

THE ARTS IN ROTORUA. IN SPITE OF THE CULTURAL NATURE
OF THE FESTIVAL, MULDOON AND FRASER GOT TOGETHER WITH THE
LEADERS OF THE PACIFIC ISLAND COUNTRIES TO WATER DOWN
ALMOST TO NON-EXISTENCE THE SOUTH PACIFIC NUCLEAR
WEAPONS FREE ZONE THAT HAD BEEN SPONSORED AT THE U.N.
BY THE PREVIOUS LABOUR GOVERNMENT.

8. BASIC NEW ZEALAND ATTITUDES TOWARDS JAPAN ARE
STILL COLORED TO SOME EXTENT BY MEMORIES OF THE JAPANESE
THREAT DURING WORLD WAR II. NEVERTHELESS, JAPAN IS LOOKED
UPON AS A BIG AND HOPEFULLY GROWING MARKET FOR NEW ZEALAND
GOODS, AND JAPANESE TOURISTS ARE HELPING TO EXPAND
SUBSTANTIAL TOURISM EARNINGS IN THIS COUNTRY. THERE IS

LITTLE UNEASINESS IN NEW ZEALAND THAT THE POWER BALANCE
IN THE PACIFIC WILL SHIFT TOWARDS THE SOVIET UNION SO
LONG AS THE UNITED STATES STAYS INVOLVED. THUS, NEW
ZEALAND'S BASIC PUROSE CERTAINLY UNDER THIS GOVERNMENTH
AND REASONABLY, WE BELIEVE, UNDER FUTURE GOVERNMENTS AS
WELL, WILL BE TO KEEP THE UNITED STATES INVOLVED IN THIS
AREA OF THE PACIFIC.
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